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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a process for community colleges to engage and direct discontinuous change in the face of the coming millennium. Described are several characteristics of change envisioned in the near future, including a complete break with the past, major reconstruction of nearly every element of the organization, and modification of the mental models used by organizational personnel to construct reality. Defined in the paper are the following steps in realignment for optimal productivity and performance in the organizational culture: (1) conduct a change-readiness audit--examine the college as an organic system whose interdependent parts must realign cooperatively; (2) implement transformational change--assist personnel in rethinking their frame of reference regarding the internal and external environments of the college; and (3) apply transactional change, addressing what modifications to the college's mission, delivery system, and internal structure are needed to engage the new challenges. Hagerstown Community College (Maryland) is proposed as a useful example of organizational transformation. Included are steps in the change management design and strategic implementations. (12 references) (AS)

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INSTRUCTIONAL REORGANIZATION: THE PROCESS

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Introduction: A Vision--Redefined

The new century is nearly upon us! There is consensus that its primary characteristic will be change. The type of change will be different. Its characteristics include: a complete break with the past; major reconstructions of nearly every element of the organization; and modification of the mental models used by organizational personnel to construct reality. Nadler, Shaw, and Walton of the Delta Consulting Group, New York, characterize the new change as discontinuous and suggest that it has the potential to be ". . . traumatic, painful, and demanding."[1] Is there a process that can be used to engage and direct discontinuous change?

In early 1998, a group of international educators met in Glion, Switzerland, to describe the role of higher education in meeting the challenges of the millennium. Their "Glion Declaration" suggests that the new millennium will present a "bewildering mixture of promise and threat." What is clear is that the essential key to engaging the demands of a "daunting new world" is knowledge. The nature of the knowledge required is tripartite. It must use technology humanely, apply resources judiciously, and involve people benevolently.[2] How will the process be implemented?

Bryant reminds us that in times of comprehensive, profound change we need to prepare for a parallax. This science concept is "an obvious directional shift of an object [or organization], which is the result of a new point of observation, causing a new line of sight."[3] Community colleges have been at the cutting edge of societal change for, at least, the past half century. Discontinuous change is visible on our campuses. We are heading in new directions. A new parallax is almost inevitable. What is required if community colleges are to maintain their niche as agents of societal development?

Contemporary organizational development is filled with designs for engaging the millennium. Trahant, Burke, and Koonce provide a comprehensive synthesis. Organizations must develop the capacity for "continuous change and renewal in an age of globalization, accelerating development and deployment of new technologies, and the rapid . . . emergence of new competitors, products, and [clients].[4] Their design is particularly well suited to community colleges.

The vision held by our colleges must be refocused. Our organizational culture needs to realign itself for optimal productivity and performance. The steps in the process are clear:

- Conduct a change-readiness audit–examine the college as an organic system whose interdependent parts must realign cooperatively.
- Implement transformational change–assist personnel in rethinking their frame of reference regarding the internal and external environments of the college.
- Apply transactional change–what modifications to the college's mission, delivery system, and internal structure are needed to engage the new challenges.[5]

Clearly, community colleges must implement comprehensive reorganization if the institutions are to remain viable. Two colleges, one small and suburban, the other large and urban, have undergone and continue to refine comprehensive redesign. The steps in the process will be detailed below.

The Transformation Process

The Hagerstown Community College context is a useful example of organizational transformation. In 1997, staff conducted an institutionwide self-assessment using a model normed nationally. The resulting data indicated that the college's operating structure was inconsistent with changing internal and external environments.

Operational processes had been in place for over a quarter of a century with little modification. The college's president was concerned that emerging external competition and increasing internal frustration threatened institutional viability.

A strategy for re-examining all aspects of the college required the involvement of stakeholders from all levels. Trahant, et. al., suggest that enlisting people's passion and energy is essential to the process of transformation.[6] The president established a sixteen member organizational structure committee. The members functioned as a self-directed work team. They examined every aspect of the college. Further, they researched models in operation at comparable institutions. Also, they conducted five heterogeneous focus groups to determine employee satisfaction and commitment to the college's mission. Finally, they developed a staff survey that was sent to every college employee. The survey sought to elicit feedback on the effectiveness of existing policies and procedures as well as the design of work processes. After six months of work, the committee produced a reorganization plan containing a series of recommendations for restructuring the college.

The president accepted the report. The acceptance did not signify an unqualified commitment to complete implementation. Rather, the president presented a transactional design focused on reshaping the college's internal structure. The design called for refocusing the college's mission, engaging the challenges presented by new competitors, modifying those structures which were clearly obsolete, and implementing the change process in an evolutionary fashion that is consistent with financial resources

and an organizational culture that is over half a century old. The steps in the design are revealing:

- Use the college's planning council to fully explore and interpret changing internal and external scenarios.
- Modify the college's planning and decision making processes to emphasize strategic thinking and strategic operation.
- Evolve a framework involving all college stakeholders that will assess the progress of the fundamental change efforts envisioned in the organizational structure committee report.
- Implement a series of communication and data gathering efforts that will disseminate the outcomes of change and their relationship to the college's culture.

The change management design is consistent with national trends. Roueche and Roueche report the result of a national study in which colleges that used a similar design:

- reflect returns and achievements exceeding original expectations;
- earned recognition from external agents for excellence in instruction, service, and products;
- implemented new degrees and training programs aligned with client needs; and
- achieved currency in the application of new technology.[7]

What is the status of implementation at Hagerstown Community College?

Strategic Implementations

The first step in the change management design was the statement of a series of core values. These were developed by the president and refined by a cross functional team within the college. All employees will have the opportunity to provide input to them through a focus group design. Kline and Saunders suggest that using such a model

reinforces the importance of demonstrating ". . . respect [for] all people, promoting unity, trust, pride, and dedication to . . . mission."[8]

The second step is the establishment of a collegewide newsletter delivered in both electronic and print format. The purpose of the newsletter is to promote communication among all employees through creating an open environment in which all are encouraged to share ideas without fear of reprisal.

Communication will be reinforced through a regularly scheduled colloquium process. The president will moderate a forum that will be both topical and free form. All employees are invited to attend and participate. Trahant, et. al., describe the process as the "creation of a climate of alignment" through which employees come to understand the important link between their daily effort and the organization's success.[9]

The third step is the implementation of a "learning community design." The process will permeate the college strategic planning, budget development, instructional redesign, student services reform, and the streamlined delivery of service to clients, credit and noncredit. The basis of the design is tripartite.

- Learning comes through the work of the college--learning is not separate from doing; it is a seamless activity–learning/doing/learning.
- Learning is developmental–all employees are committed to a process of continuous improvement that is linked to the college's core values.
- Learning means discovery–all employees are encouraged to try new methods, correct errors, and develop improved methods of performance.

The design increases ownership of the college's mission among all employees. Kline and Saunders describe the approach as "generative learning." It promotes positive, owned change.[10]

The last step is the implementation of a team approach to accountability. The college's planning council will use the 26 benchmarks established by the Maryland Higher Education Commission to assess the impact of the change management design. These indicators reflect the degree of satisfaction reported by various clients. The results will be used to modify or redirect both strategic planning and management at the college. Further, the changes made in the college's structure as a result of the reorganization plan will be measured against these indicators. The process of continuous improvement is a journey, not a destination. What has the change process taught the participants thus far?

Conclusion: What Have We Learned

The process of continuous improvement as a strategy for engaging discontinuous change is complex, painful, and sometimes confusing. Kline and Saunders provide the most insightful synthesis. "Since change will occur in the organization, individuals must change also. And if the change is to be effective for anyone, everyone must change."[11] The implementation of a change management design at HCC has been in operation for just over a year. An informal review of the process provides a formative assessment of progress. The following insights have emerged:

- Don't change anything until all stakeholders are made aware of the purposes of change and the projected outcomes. The college didn't provide the information in all cases; the result was frustration and mistrust.
- Use a broad, participative process in identifying and implementing targets of change. In general the college did so and ownership/understanding is high.
- Provide the change management group with the information and technical support needed to function efficiently. The college has done so and progress is occurring.

- Respect the concerns of those personnel/areas undergoing change. The college didn't provide a structured communication process to elicit concerns. The result has been some anger and a significant investment of time to "rework" the procedure.

- Communicate, communicate, communicate throughout the college community. The change management design is based on broad, open communication. The results have been positive thus far, but even more communication is planned.

- Build evaluation into every step of the process. The college's planning council has monitored the process faithfully. All employees are aware of their opportunity to provide feedback. As the strategy evolves, appropriate evaluation procedures will be applied.

The institutional redesign process at HCC is well under way. Those involved appear to be guardedly optimistic about the impact of the process on the college's culture. What questions remain to be answered?

- How well is HCC doing at implementing the process in comparison with other community colleges?

- Are there other processes that we should be implementing to improve our outcomes?

- Is it possible to fundamentally redesign some of the existing processes to obtain radical improvements in outcomes?

- What changes in our organizational culture--especially mental models and ethics--will enhance employee ownership of change?

These questions cannot be answered currently. However, college personnel agree with Einstein's dictum that "no problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world view."[12] We are about reinventing our future.

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